

Winchester Broadband Committee Approved Minutes 8/2/2021

Members Present In Person: Jennifer Bellan, Natalie Quevado, Larry Wood, Leonard Picard, Nichole Pelkey

Members present via Zoom/Phone: Jennifer Howe

Natalie Quevado called the meeting to order at 7:33 pm

Leonard Picard makes motion to approve minutes from 7/26/2021. Jenn Bellan seconded. All are in favor.

Guest Speaker: Jeff McGiver joined at 7:39 pm

Works at consolidated communications; his role is fiber expansion. He has been working for the last 2 ½ - 3 years on ways to bring better broadband to Cheshire and Sullivan counties. 14 towns have voted in favor of a public/private partnership. At this time, he would normally be talking about bonding for broadband (Chesterfield model), but there are developments with state and federal grants and funding that is coming. He is still waiting on additional information from the state regarding how funds will be set up. As towns have reached out, he is advising to follow through with current processes as a plan B just in case funds don't work out. The funds are potentially a nice plan A. Another benefit of moving forward with an RFP is it shows interest with moving forward as well as a level of commitment – this allows Consolidated to estimate the cost to build out infrastructure.

Question to Jeff (from Natalie) – Is it too much to ask for the RFP to be returned to committee by 8/31?
Jeff - Consolidated has turned these around in that amount of time.

Questions to Jeff (from Jenn Bellan) – How far out for development should we be looking at? How many years are we expecting development? There are places in town that are remote but the potential for development is real, we just don't know when. Jeff- as long as there is a communication path in place (poles, conduit, etc) they can bring fiber.

Natalie – thought extra poles would be added. Jeff – that's something we could talk about if there is an area that needs extra poles. If new development happens down the road (5-10 years for example) will still bring fiber to that area. As far as the last house – will bring fiber to them as long as there are poles. Larry – this was one of the things he faced. He could get Comcast but they wanted to charge \$4400 to put in the lines. Jeff - Understands that. The demand has increased. Consolidated is committed to the direction of fiber. They see it as the future and are doing everything they can to bring fiber into communities. Networks are constructed working from central offices where pieces of equipment are in town. It doesn't matter if you are a current customer or not, as long as you are in the path you would be eligible for broadband. Consolidated could potentially work with towns to determine if there is a certain area that needs to go first. They work fast with multiple crews. They usually start early September when a town gets a bond and by December most of work is done and are turning on customers in January. Larry – is consolidated picking up some of the areas on their own as part of the

infrastructure or is it all within the bond? Jeff- It depends on how many are underserved. Consolidated will pick up served. And then they will pick up tab from pole, including equipment in and out of the house. When a project is delivered/communicated, people will see there is a partnership between Consolidated and the town (bond). When this is done, towns will own a piece of the network. Westmoreland was 92% underserved – Westmoreland will own that 92%.

Nichole – If grants come through do we need to wait for March vote? Jeff – No, it is like the CARES fund and if we are awarded, we do not need to vote. If no bond, no need to vote – all the towns that have gone the bonding route, they will have a fiber subscriber rate that is anywhere from \$8-12. The town will take a bond out and pay Consolidated in 3 installments. Each resident that signs on will pay the subscriber recovery fee each month. Those months go to Consolidated and get put into separate bucket. Over time this goes to pay towards the bond, but they cannot say that in contract. The contract says Consolidated pays the town the operating fee which is close to what the subscriber fee is. This gets the bond paid off and all that want fiber can have it. Consolidated continues to maintain and upgrade. As demand increases, Consolidated can keep up with that.

Nat – What is the typical cost the average home would be paying to subscribe? Jeff- The pricing model is the same across the state. We would pay the same as residents in Concord, Manchester, Nashua, etc. For example, if Consolidated offers 50 over 50 for \$35 and if the subscriber fee is \$10, the customer would pay \$45. There are multiple plans available. The price listed is an example. Once the bond is paid off, the subscriber fee goes away. Consolidated cannot make any money from the bond.

Larry–Which is easier to implement, a bond or a grant? Jeff – Grant would be easier and faster. There is no fiber recovery fee with a grant because there is nothing to pay back. There won't be a bond payment and there will be less paperwork/commitment. But, some towns like the idea of being under an agreement. We did not apply for the NTIA grant (ran out of time). It looks like it was built specifically for states/regions/larger regions because it was \$5million and greater.

At this point, bonding is our only option due to the deadline of the grant application.

Larry – Does anyone do any type of operating lease? Jeff - Consolidated will be buying network from Chesterfield for \$1 after 20 years. Since then others have gone in a different direction.

Len – How do you determine the subscriber fee? Jeff - All subscribers pay the same fee. The business model has to do with how many miles that need to run lines, how many subscribers are expected, etc. When thinking about state funds in unserved areas, downtown usually has good speed – outside of town/rural areas do not. This is referred to as the donut effect. Equipment is usually downtown and needs to pass by all these roads and houses to get to the outside. Consolidated will use their own capital and cover those closer in town.

Nat – What is the number of subscribers Consolidated wants to hit to be considered viable? Jeff – Winchester is the third or fourth largest town in the county and the road miles are not too high, so that helps. He is not sure what the penetration level is in the town as of right now.

Jeff left meeting at 8:15 pm

Property Value Update from Len – 2,410 underserved (less than 25/3). Served -1,587 Waiting on data from Nichole (emailed). He will update with additional information from poll & surveys. Jenn H had asked Lindseigh Picard for some of the financial information related to the schools. Jenn Bellan – Should we consider extending broadband to the ranger station at the state park? Nat – We would need to request permission – this is considered out of scope. Larry – Any interest in putting hotspots around town? This is also considered out of scope for the initial broadband project committee, but could be considered in the future.

Mapping update from Larry – Larry took the two maps and put in the broadband shared site under Larry's folder. He pulled out addresses that Consolidated and Comcast serviced and then pulled out where neither one services. Jenn Bellan has completed her section of the map. Jen H & Nichole need to complete. Larry should have as much done as he can by Wednesday to present to select board.

RFP Review - Natalie makes motion to approve RFP as written pending Larry's revisions map. Nichole seconds. All are in favor.

Covid Funding Request Letter – Nichole makes motion to approve letter as written. Len seconded. All are in favor.

The Select board meeting will be Wednesday at 6:30.

Nichole will not be at 16th meeting and is looking for someone to take minutes. Natalie will take notes.

Next meeting will be August 16th at 7:30. Mapping should be done by then and we can send out the RFP.

Len made motion to adjourn at 9:10 pm. Larry seconded. All are in favor and meeting adjourned.